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INFO RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0266
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RHMFSS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000633

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PGOV IS MR

SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN - ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP SAFE -- FOR NOW

Classified By: CDA Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (SBU) Articles in the Mauritanian Arab press on October 28 suggested that General Aziz was on the verge of severing relations with Israel in response to "the will of the people." Rumors within the diplomatic community suggested that the Israeli Ambassador had been convoked by Aziz to get the bad news.

¶2. (C) Charge met October 30 with Israeli Ambassador Arbel who said the reports were wrong. He had met October 29 with junta "Foreign Minister" Ould Mohamedou who had lobbied the Israeli's to see that the regime "is your best option" in terms of the long-term Mauritanian-Israeli relationship. Ould Mohamedou told Arbel that while there was pressure being placed on the regime to cut ties with Israel, "the General and I like you" and the junta had no intention of cutting ties. The "Foreign Minister" ran through the security concerns that played in Israel's interests -- a more serious approach to the AQIM threat from abroad and the end of Abdallahi's appeasement strategy with radical Islamists. Ould Mohamedou insisted that the political situation will resolve itself soon -- "we will have a true national dialogue and release Abdallahi sooner than you think." Arbel found the "Foreign Minister" engaging and impressive although he noted with concern that in his two meetings with Ould Mohamedou there has been no note taker -- raising concern that their conversations may not be reported through channels or reflect an "official" position (he also noted Ould Mohamedou did not remember important parts of their first meeting suggesting, at minimum, a bad management style).

¶3. (C) Ambassador Arbel told Charge he remains under guidance from Tel Aviv that he can only present his credentials to President Abdallahi despite pressure from the regime to present credentials to Aziz. Arbel arrived very soon after the coup. He met initially with Foreign Minister Ben Hmeida who, luckily for diplomatic purposes, stayed on with the regime immediately following the coup and therefore could be met as "President Abdallahi's" Foreign Minister. Ben Hmeida had objected that Arbel's official documentation was addressed to President Abdallahi but relented when Arbel said that was all he was going to get. Arbel told the Mauritians he would be happy to meet with General Aziz but that he would not present his credentials to him nor acknowledge him as head of state. Arbel was not convoked by Aziz as rumored. He indicated he did not believe the Israeli Government would change its position -- sticking instead to the international line.

¶4. (C) Charge told Arbel the U.S. saw no credibility in the game plan being suggested by the regime. A "National Dialogue" organized under the thumb of the High State Council and the Laghdaf "government" could not be credible -- even less so if President Abdallahi and his supporters were not a full and willing partner. Charge also noted the strong U.S.

conviction that the return to constitutional order necessarily required the return to office of President Abdallahi and the departure of the military from any political role -- political decisions after those conditions are wide open, but that constitutional point of departure must be established first. Arbel said he was aware that the regime would be willing to use the relationship as a bargaining chip to gain popular support or get international funding (citing specifically Libya) or to try to get Israel to try to pressure the U.S. to be more accommodating. He noted, however, that the only real Israeli interest in the Mauritanian relationship is the public value of the relationship itself. There is no over-riding strategic value to the relationship that Tel Aviv could not walk away from.

¶5. (C) Arbel noted Tel Aviv's primary focus in Mauritania is not so much the political situation but Mission security -- with decisions on who could stay at post and who had to leave changing week-to-week. Arbel had been pulled out for several weeks because of security threats to be allowed back about 10 days ago. Spouses were being kept out but returned to post a few days ago. The Israeli's are actively looking for a better location for their chancery and residence -- one possible chancery location is across the street from our own location.

HANKINS